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European Views of East-West Relations After the Summit

The successful outcome of the Summit has won almost unanimous approval in Western Europe. There has, of course, been some carping from the Left (e.g. the Greens in Germany) that the Summit did not really accomplish anything but the views of most political leaders and independent analysts have been balanced: the outcome was good from the Western perspective but difficult problems remain.

Although many commentators also seem to go out of the way to warn against euphoria, Chancellor Kohl and Belgian Foreign Minister Tindemans, two statesmen who have staked their political life on supporting the President's policies, have tended to exaggerate the speed at which progress might now be made in INF negotiations--the most neuralgic issue for them. In general it would seem advisable for the US to keep dampening expectations of any early breakthrough on this and other issues in order to prevent pressures for progress to create strains in the Western Alliance.

Besides INF the major potential problems to monitor NATO will likely be:

- The extent and effectiveness of the probable Soviet drive to portray SDI as the obstacle to any further progress.
- The tendency of Europeans to see Gorbachev not only as a different type of Soviet leader, but also as one who is "better for Europe".
- The impact of European press speculations--supported by the solicited comments of former US officials--that the US military-industrial complex will lobby hard against any arms reduction agreements.
- The divisive competition which might develop among countries and parties to create their own "detente" with Moscow.

In sum the Summit has surprised many European critics by demonstrating the validity of President Reagan's approach to the Soviet Union. At the same time it has not resolved--and could not have been expected to resolve--the underlying difficulties in managing the Alliance's approach to East-West relations.